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Thousands of young people, unionists, and others will be taking to the streets of New York before and during the Republican National Convention to say "Defeat Bush!"

We wholeheartedly agree and join with them. And we say, "Defeat Kerry too!" The Republicans and Democrats are twin parties of imperialist war, economic depression,

EDITORIAL

and racist oppression.

We urge you to support the only working-class alternative to these two parties of capitalism: the Socialist Workers Party ticket of Róger Calero for president and Arrin Hawkins for vice president.

Why hold your nose to vote for the rotten "choice" of the Democratic Party nominee, John Kerry, who is so unappealing that many prefer to say they are voting

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SWP candidates Róger Calero for president, left, Arrin Hawkins for vice president.

"against Bush"? Why vote for Kerry, who recently confirmed he would have voted to back President George Bush in invading Iraq even if he had known there were no "weapons of mass destruction" there? The liberal capitalists told Kerry to say this clearly, so that the generals who have endorsed him



can stand up and say he is as good as Bush, or even better, as the "commander in chief" of their imperialist military.

Why vote for Kerry, who was quick to side with Bush's endorsement of Ariel Sharon's "settlement plan" and who backs

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Socialists prepare to campaign in N.Y. protests around Republican convention as they wind up ballot drives

BY PATTIE THOMPSON
AND BILL SCHMITT

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin—At an August 7 public celebration here, Socialist Workers Party vice-presidential candidate Arrin Hawkins urged those present to build on the party's successful spring subscription campaign and summer ballot drives by joining other socialist campaigners in the streets of New York City for the labor and protest actions during the week leading up to and through the Republican National

Convention.

"During those 12 days we will take part in a full street-campaigning effort," Hawkins said. "Every day we will be joining the issues in debates and discussions and presenting an independent working-class revolutionary perspective that no one else has—with newspapers and books, public programs, classes, and other activities that give clear answers to the big questions in world politics and point a road forward for working people."

Socialist Workers Party campaigners here were celebrating the success in collecting 3,650 signatures to put the socialist presidential ticket on the ballot in this state. This is well above the required number of 2,000. The Socialist Workers campaign is filing to put its candidates—Róger Calero for president and his running mate Arrin Hawkins—on the ballot in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

Many people who signed the petitions did so because of its working-class platform, said Alex Alvarado, one of the campaigners. "It struck a chord with their experience." For example, he noted, in Wisconsin as in other Midwestern states they met meat packers and other workers who have been through union battles.

"We need strong unions," a member of the Brewery Workers Union told Ved Dookhun after he pointed to one of the central demands of the socialist platform: for workers' right to organize unions and to defend themselves from the bosses' offensive. She urged the campaigners to visit her union's informational picket lines at the Miller Brewing Co. plant, where members of the Brewery Workers were engaged in a contract fight.

Responding enthusiastically to the campaign's demand for creating jobs through massive public works projects, a man in his early 20s told campaigner Jenny Johnson-Blanchard, as he added his signature to the petition, about his ongoing struggle to find work. A temp agency had sent him to the Miller brewery, where he discovered the union pickets and refused to cross the

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Utah miners in trench war with bosses to win UMW representation

BY ANNE CARROLL
AND PAT MILLER

HUNTINGTON, Utah—A trench war between the bosses and coal miners organizing to win representation by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) is going on at the Co-Op mine here, workers report.

The miners, who returned to the job July 12 after a nine-and-a-half month strike, say they are making progress in winning support among other production workers for

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Washington threatens Iran, demanding it halt nuclear energy program

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. officials have made it clear once again they will use the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a cover to intensify the imperialist campaign against Iran, waged under the banner of "nuclear non-proliferation." Their statements indicate that Washington is laying the groundwork for possible military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities if Tehran does not halt its nuclear energy

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Venezuela: mass rally says 'no' to pro-imperialist recall

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

Hundreds of thousands turned out for a march and rally in downtown Caracas August 8 to support the call for a "no" vote in the referendum on whether Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez should be recalled.

"We won't let them turn us back," said José Landines, a truck driver from the January 23 neighborhood of Caracas, referring to the pro-imperialist opposition coalition, Coordinadora Democrática, which has spearheaded the referendum scheduled for August 15. Speaking to the *Militant* by phone the day of the action, Landines said he and thousands of his neighbors took part in the demonstration to defend the elected government. He and others interviewed by the *Militant* said this was the largest of a number of similar protests that have

taken place since June, when the National Electoral Council (CNE) set the date for the recall ballot.

In a sign of the faltering momentum of the opposition campaign, international capital in the oil industry has become more and more favorable to the stability they hope would come from a strong win by the Chávez administration, an article in the August 9 *Financial Times* reported.

There have been improvements in the economy during the first half of this year, largely fueled by higher oil prices on the world market. State revenues have been boosted. Unemployment has fallen and food prices have stabilized. Advances in government-sponsored social programs—from literacy campaigns to public works—are

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Rise in homelessness in N.Y. is fueled by 5-year welfare cutoff

This is the second of two articles. The first appeared in the August 17 *Militant* with the headline: “Housing crisis in N.Y. adds to grind on workers; rents eat up wages, number in shelters up 60% in 3 years.”

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

NEW YORK—Mayor Michael Bloomberg recently announced a policy by his administration that he said is intended to reduce the number of people who are homeless in this city by two-thirds within five years. Couched in terms of concern for the “truly needy,” a key aspect of this policy is a more stringent use of eligibility requirements for those applying for shelter. One method, already used by city housing officials, is to disqualify people more systematically on the grounds that they have the “option” of doubling up with relatives.

More than 38,000 workers are living in shelters throughout the five boroughs, according to the New York Department of Homeless Services—a 60 percent jump since 2001. This increase coincides with the five-year cutoff period for workers receiving federal welfare payments.

The main increase in recent years has been in the number of families, mostly single women with children. Some 9,000 families with 16,000 children are now staying in city shelters. Many of these are workers who end up in a shelter on a short-term basis. Some are evicted from their apartments after losing their jobs, or after a family health crisis or a case of domestic violence, and manage to get back into an apartment after a few months.

In addition, several thousand working people are living on the streets. Although city officials report nearly 2,700 people in this situation, the Coalition for the Homeless challenges that figure as a substantial undercount, without offering its own estimate. In 1990 the U.S. Census Bureau reported some 10,000 people sleeping in public spaces in New York City, but that number is considered an undercount as well. A significant number of workers living on the streets are

ill, physically or mentally. Instead of being provided with medical care, which they cannot afford, they are thrown onto the streets. Hassled by the police, some have been pushed out of central Manhattan and are reappearing in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. A few months ago, for example, cops in the Bronx shut down an encampment of homeless workers living under a bridge not far from my apartment complex.

Rise of homelessness in late '70s

Homelessness became a mass phenomenon in cities across the country in the late 1970s, with the onset of the economic crisis resulting from the long-term decline in profit rates that marked the end of the post-World War II expansion. In New York City the number of working people—mostly men—sleeping in parks, on sidewalks, and in subway stations, as well as in shelters, grew sharply in the early 1980s.

The number of homeless here peaked around 1987, and declined sharply in subsequent years, as the city administration of Edward Koch built new housing and moved in thousands of previously homeless people, reported Shelly Nortz of the Coalition for the Homeless in an August 4 phone interview.

As the economic crisis deepened, however, homelessness again began to rise in the late 1990s.

The sharp rise in the number of workers who are homeless since 2001 coincides with the five-year cutoff for people receiving federal welfare benefits. In 1996 President William Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

The “welfare reform” law stipulated a five-year lifetime limit on receipt of federal welfare payments. That period was supposedly to allow people to make a transition from welfare to a job. When it ended, however, thousands would go off the “five-year cliff,” as the late Democratic senator Daniel Moynihan had warned at the time the law was passed.

UK bus workers win strike, push back company concession demands



John Smith

Bus workers in South Yorkshire in the United Kingdom on the picket line August 9 during their nearly three-week strike against First bus company. The unionists, members of the Transport and General Workers union, returned to work the next day after the company backed down from its demand that workers’ first day’s sick pay would be deducted. The bosses also accepted the union demand for schedules of no more than eight and a half hours per day, and at least one break every four and a half hours.

Of the nearly 122,000 families in New York City that were cut off over the course of 2002, tens of thousands either have found no jobs or earn poverty-level wages. The year 2002 marked the largest one-year jump in homelessness in the city in nearly two decades.

Abuse and degrading conditions

At the 200-plus shelters around the city, workers face degrading conditions and a callous bureaucracy that treats them like criminals. Many are kicked out for breaking the long list of rules.

Meanwhile, workers living on the streets are harassed and arrested by the cops. The New York Police Department’s “Homeless Outreach Unit” arrests people for “crimes” such as sleeping in the park.

Those applying for shelter must produce documents to prove they are homeless, such as eviction papers or letters from the landlord who threw them out. Families must prove they are really a family, presenting birth certificates, custody papers, or certification as domestic partners. About half the families applying for shelter are rejected for not answering to the satisfaction of their interrogators. One of the most hated institutions is the Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU) in the Bronx, the only remaining site in New York City where families can apply for shelter. Working people applying for shelter complain of abusive treatment by guards and caseworkers. They report that food in the cafeteria is often spoiled and has made many people sick.

“The city places many families in temporary housing night after night, requiring that they return to the Emergency Assistance

Unit repeatedly before they are assigned something more permanent,” reported Stephanie Carberry in a January 1 article in the *Gotham Gazette*. They must continue to trek back to the Bronx even if they are staying at a distant site and their children are forced to miss school. All family members must be present at the interviews or the application is rejected.

For years, families waiting to be placed in shelters routinely had to spend the night sleeping on the floors of the EAU, a practice that was finally declared illegal and halted last year. City authorities have now said they will shut down the notorious facility and replace it.

“It’s like a prison,” Kevin Woods, in his early 20s, told the *Militant* in an August 3 interview outside the EAU. “The conditions are horrific.” Woods said he moved to New York from California to live with his brother and sister-in-law. But his brother got divorced and Woods was kicked out of the apartment, he said. Because of a knee injury that has required several operations, he’s been out of work and now without a roof over his head.

“I have three kids, and the one-year-old has asthma,” said José Rodríguez. “They are

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Venezuela referendum

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also a factor in the loss of steam for the pro-imperialist opposition.

As the vote approached, larger sections of the middle classes and some groups until recently allied with the opposition appeared to be joining the vote “no” campaign. The day before the march, officials of Venezuela’s Evangelical church, which claims a few million members, called for a “no” vote in the referendum. “This is new,” said Wikénferd Oliver, director of international relations of the Youth of the Fifth Republic Movement, the governing party, in an August 9 phone interview. “Until now, no major religious group had done that.”

“I saw many more professionals at the Sunday rally than previous demonstrations,” said Ebesis García, a saleswoman for a food distribution company, referring to the August 8 mobilization. Her observation was confirmed in other interviews and press accounts of the action.

The same day, a few thousand people turned out for a car caravan and an all-day rock concert in Chacao, a wealthy neighborhood of Venezuela’s capital, according to the *Miami Herald* and interviews by the *Militant*. Coordinadora Democrática, which is led by figures in Fedecámaras, the country’s main business association, had organized the musical event to promote its campaign to unseat the government.

Weighty sections of Venezuela’s capitalist class with U.S. government backing organized the recall vote in an increasingly desperate attempt to oust the elected government. Two previous tries did not succeed, and have in fact led to the weakening of the opposition.

The first, a U.S.-backed military coup in April 2002, failed within three days in face of massive street mobilizations by working people throughout the country that divided the military.

The second, a bosses’ “strike” in December 2002 and January 2003, crippled production for more than two months in the oil industry, the country’s main economic resource. But as millions of workers defied the employers’ sabotage of the economy, taking over refineries and other plants and restarting production, the lockout crumbled. One of the fruits of the workers’ victory in that class confrontation was a completely new management for PDVSA, the state-owned oil company.

Leading up to the lockout, the Chávez administration had angered most of Venezuela’s wealthy ruling families and their allies in Washington by doubling the royalties that investors have to pay for oil exploration contracts and taking other measures to strengthen state control of the country’s natural resources.

Other measures passed by the government in the fall of 2001 that drew the ire of the majority of Venezuela’s bourgeoisie included an agrarian reform law, a bill protecting small fishermen from overfishing by large commercial companies, and the allocation of state funds for affordable housing and other social programs.

The government’s normalization of trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the work in Venezuela of some 16,000 doctors, literacy teachers, and other volunteers from Cuba over the last two years, have also stoked the fury of many Venezuelan capitalists and landlords and their backers in the United States.

Opposition campaign losing steam

One of the many indications that the pro-imperialist opposition has been running out of steam was the August 9 *Financial Times* article. Titled “Oil industry seeks decisive Chávez poll win,” the article begun: “A decisive victory for Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez in next Sunday’s recall referendum on his leadership could help pave the way for billions of dollars of fresh international investment in the country’s oil and gas sector.”

Venezuela is the fifth-largest oil producer in the world and PDVSA provides some 80 percent of the country’s export revenue. More than 50 percent of its oil exports go to the United States and Canada.

“Industry analysts say that international companies, short of opportunities elsewhere, would welcome an end to the extreme political instability that has plagued the last two years in particular of the radical leader’s six years in office,” said the London daily.

The article quoted Fareed Mohamedi, chief economist of the Washington-based

PFC Energy, saying, “The companies are a lot more sanguine about the political situation and they have become convinced that Mr. Chávez is a man they can do business with.”

“Two months ago, following a protracted campaign,” the article said, “opposition groups forced Mr. Chávez to hold a recall referendum. With the economy recovering strongly, however, the president expects to see off the challenge and avoid calling elections before those scheduled for 2006.... International companies have also begun to realize that in spite of his hostility towards Venezuela’s traditional business elites, Mr. Chávez is anxious to maintain good relations with international companies, particularly in the oil sector.”

Even an article in the August 6 *Wall Street Journal* by Mary Anastasia O’Grady, notorious for her columns that rant against Cuba and Venezuela, had to acknowledge these facts. “In recent weeks, the chattering classes have begun to suggest that [Chávez] can win fair and square,” she said. “The Chávez government is a leading proponent of this line and is now claiming that all polls show it has a clear advantage of 15 to 25 points. More impartial parties also opine now that he could win, albeit in a tight race.”

Most of those interviewed by the *Militant* said an all-out effort by the “vote no” campaign over the last six weeks has made a difference. Wikénferd Oliver said that more than 1.2 million volunteers have been organized around the country, most of them young, to visit registered voters house-to-house and convince them to vote against the recall. The volunteers are organized in teams of 10 people, each of whom is responsible for visiting and getting to know 10 other people. The teams belong to Electoral Battle Units (UBE) that have been created in most neighborhoods across the country.

At the same time, recent improvements in the economy and steady advances in a number of social programs the government has launched have worked against the opposition campaign, Oliver and others said.

Economic improvements

“Unemployment is now down to about 12 percent, according to the government,” said Antonio Aguillón, a unionist in Caracas, in an August 9 phone interview. The official jobless rate hovered between 18 and 20 percent last year.

In a number of interviews, a range of workers gave examples of new jobs they’ve been able to get since this spring. Ebesis García said she found her job at a privately owned food distribution company two months ago.

Carlos Enrique Rángel was a truck driver in Caracas who worked until 2002 for Industrial de Perfumes, a cosmetics company the bosses shut down. He had been unemployed for more than a year, surviving on seasonal work in construction, when a relative told



AP /Leslie Mazoch

Hundreds of thousands rallied in Caracas, Venezuela, August 8, for a ‘no’ vote in the referendum. The recall vote is spearheaded by weighty sections of the country’s capitalists who have Washington’s backing, with the aim of toppling the elected government.

him about hundreds of new jobs at the Deltana natural gas project in the eastern state of Anzoátegui, where ChevronTexaco recently began drilling on two concessions it negotiated with the government. “It’s a little far from home,” he said, “but it’s the first chance for stability, to have security that I can feed the family.”

Car sales in the country were double in July compared to a year ago, according to a news item posted by *just-auto.com* on August 9.

The country’s gross domestic product grew nearly 30 percent the first quarter of this year, Venezuela’s Central Bank reported, after dropping by a similar figure the first quarter of 2003.

Public works, including new projects to repair roads, bridges, and other parts of the country’s infrastructure, have added new jobs, Aguillón and other workers said.

In May the government raised the minimum wage to 300,000 bolivars (about \$150) per month, a 50 percent increase, Aguillón noted.

Luis Casadiego said another positive development for working people is “the spreading and vast improvement of the Mercals,” the government supermarkets.

Casadiego, who organizes a community center housing a neighborhood clinic operated by Cuban doctors in the Montepiedad section of the January 23 neighborhood in Caracas, said the Mercals are now open three hours more per day, until 9:00 p.m., “and you can find almost everything you need for cooking on their shelves.”

Until early this year, the stock of the Mercals was scant, and people could buy only up to a certain quantity of food per month. “Now rationing exists in very few items, and more and more people are abandoning shop-

ping at the private food stores,” Casadiego said. His observations were confirmed in many other interviews with workers, farmers, and students in Valencia, San Carlos, and Barcelona.

The prices at these stores are about half of what food costs on average in the private markets. “I just bought two kilos [4.5 lbs] of chicken for 4,000 bolivars [\$2] at the Mercal around the corner,” said Ebesis García. “It costs 8,000 at most of the private stores.”

García and others said that although the official inflation rate remains high, about 13 percent annually, the greatly reduced food prices at the Mercals, which the majority of the population now has access to, is making a difference in working peoples’ ability to survive.

Literacy campaigns that have involved some 4 million people over the last year, organized with the help and volunteer trainers from Cuba, have further undermined the pro-imperialist opposition campaign. Many of the volunteers for the house-to-house visits of the “vote no” campaign have been organized out of the literacy classes, Wikénferd Oliver said. His group, the Youth of the Fifth Republic Movement, is coordinating this effort nationally, he said.

Improved health care for many working people is also weighing against the opposition. “For the first time, a growing number of young Venezuelan doctors have joined the more than 10,000 volunteer doctors from Cuba in the Barrio Adentro program,” said Karen Freites, a medical student at the University of Carabobo in Valencia, the country’s third-largest city. “There are now 1,200 Venezuelan doctors enrolled in the program, with 130 here in Valencia alone.”

Barrio Adentro, which translates roughly
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Washington to Iran: halt nuclear program

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program. Israeli officials have also indicated that Tel Aviv might launch a strike against Iran if the U.S. government does not.

On August 8, U.S. national security advisor Condoleezza Rice said on the NBC TV program “Meet the Press” that Washington “cannot allow the Iranians to develop a nuclear weapon” and that it would press the IAEA to make “a very strong statement” at its upcoming meeting in September. A few days earlier, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell said that it was “more and more likely” that Washington would press the IAEA to refer Iran’s nuclear program to the UN Security Council as a possible prelude to imposing some combination of sanctions.

These statements followed a meeting in late July, where British, French, and German officials demanded that Tehran take steps to back away from its development of nuclear power. In response, the Iranian government announced July 30 that it would resume construction of parts for centrifuges used in the production of nuclear energy, the Associated Press reported. Tehran said it was doing this because the three European governments had not fulfilled promises to get the agreement of the IAEA to close its investigation into Iran’s nuclear energy program.

Tehran says it needs to develop nuclear power-generating technology to help meet the country’s growing demand for electric-

ity and to spur economic development. The government estimates that it needs to generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity from nuclear power plants by 2022 to meet the growing energy demands of a country of 65 million. Washington is seeking to block this program, claiming that it is a cover for Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran’s UN ambassador, said that if the IAEA took Tehran to the Security Council, then the Iranian government could not be expected to “cooperate unilaterally” with the agency, the *Financial Times* reported.

Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi said his government had not resumed uranium enrichment. “We still continue suspension on uranium enrichment,” Kharrazi said. “But we are not committed to another agreement with them [London, Paris, and Berlin] on not building centrifuges.” Centrifuges are used to make uranium hexafluoride, which can be enriched to low levels for power generation, or to high levels for nuclear weapons.

Last October, under heavy pressure from the British, French, and German governments, Tehran agreed to allow unannounced inspections of the country’s nuclear facilities. These governments pressed for the concessions from Tehran as an alternative to more aggressive moves by Washington.

As show of “good faith” Iran announced that it would temporarily suspend programs

to enrich uranium. In exchange, the three European governments gave Tehran assurances that they would not allow U.S. allegations of Iranian violations of the UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to be referred to the Security Council. They also promised to ease Tehran’s access to nuclear technology.

Government officials in Israel have made statements indicating that they make carry out an “Osirak solution,” that is, launch a strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, if Washington does not. In 1981 Tel Aviv launched a missile strike that destroyed Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor, claiming it was acting in self-defense against the threat of Iraq developing nuclear weapons.

Iran is the “biggest danger to the existence of Israel,” said Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. “Israel will not allow Iran to be equipped with a nuclear weapon.”

Reuters news agency reported August 11, “Amid media speculation that Israel may try to halt Iran’s nuclear program by carrying out air strikes on some atomic facilities in Iran, Iranian officials have been quick to stress that Tehran would retaliate promptly and strongly to any such attack.”

Iranian defense minister Ali Shamkhani said August 4 that it had carried out a field test of the latest version of its Shihab-3 medium-range ballistic missile, saying this was in response to Tel Aviv’s moves to boost its antimissile capability.

Trench war at Co-Op

Continued from front page

the UMWA and challenging the legitimacy of the company “union,” the so-called International Association of United Workers Union (IAUWU).

Miners say they are also documenting and standing up to selective enforcement of safety rules, a series of verbal and written warnings against supporters of the UMWA, and flagrant violations of the recent settlement the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) negotiated between the UMWA and Co-Op owners, the Kingstons.

To broaden solidarity with their struggle, miners say they are also responding to new invitations to speak in front of labor bodies. Labor solidarity, they note, was crucial in forcing the company to make an unconditional offer to return to all the strikers, after the NLRB ruled in June that the 75 miners had been fired illegally last September.

Phony ‘union’ meeting

In order to give a facelift to the company outfit, officers of the IAUWU organized a “union” meeting on August 6. A flyer was posted at the mine, workers said, urging miners to attend. The meeting turned into more than the bosses had bargained for because the Co-Op miners who support the UMWA decided to go. “When the first UMWA miners walked into that room you could have heard a pin drop,” said Alyson Kennedy, one of those active in the UMWA organizing effort.

When they arrived, about a dozen people were in the room, miners reported. These included Chris Grundvig, Dana Jenkins, and Warren Pratt, who are “officers” of the IAUWU—president, vice-president, and secretary treasurer, respectively. Nevin Pratt, IAUWU international vice-president was also there. All four are either bosses or directly connected to the Kingston family, according to miners who attended the meeting. These “officers” admit that there is only one local in this so-called international union—the one at Co-Op.

Seven Mexican-born miners who work on the surface in the outside shop were also at the meeting, having arrived early. These miners were not part of the strike.

More miners came to the meeting as they were getting off work. Nine who had taken part in the strike attended in all. One of these miners said he raised his hand and asked about the “new” contract Grundvig kept referring to, and whether it included an increase in pay.

The current “contract” between the IAUWU and the mine bosses expired August 10. A new contract cannot be signed until the union election ordered by the NLRB takes place. The labor board held a hearing in Price July 20-21 to determine who will be eligible to vote in the election. The NLRB mandated the vote after the strikers signed a petition for representation by the UMWA. According to Co-Op miners, the UMWA filed a follow-up brief on August 4 laying out its arguments on who should be able to vote. UMWA organizers say they expect the labor board will rule on the matter before the end of August.

The NLRB had recognized the IAUWU in 1979. Miners report that before the strike that began on Sept. 22, 2003, the IAUWU never had meetings or any real presence in the mine. The officers of this outfit did nothing to represent the workers and were supervisors at the mine. The “union” contract and other “union” material were hard to get, and when available they were always printed in English, even though most of the miners only speak Spanish.

Miners said they pointed out that the average wage for underground miners is between \$15 and \$20 an hour, and asked why most Co-Op miners were paid between \$5.50 and \$7 an hour.

The IAUWU officers kept insisting that Co-Op “doesn’t make much money,” aping the company line for why workers are paid such miserable wages, said the unionists.

Miners said they countered that they didn’t buy this claim, because the price of coal on the market now is quite high, and coal companies are making lots of money, as is Co-Op.

The IAUWU officers reportedly responded that there may be an increase in pay for workers in the higher classifications, but they had nothing to back up their claim. The miners said that Nevin Pratt kept repeating, “There are big improvements,” but the only concrete thing he would say is that workers

would get six pairs of gloves a year and a bigger clothing allowance.

“These company representatives wanted us to talk about the little things, complain about this or that problem,” said Jesús Salazar, “but we kept pressing on: ‘Where are the pay raises, insurance, and other benefits?’”

The Co-Op bosses maintain a complicated system of pay grades, supplemental wages, and bonuses to keep pay low and workers in line. The job classification “faceman,” for instance, is a level 9 position with a minimum wage of \$7 an hour and a maximum of \$11, according to the IAUWU “contract.”

This job is one of the most demanding on the production section, miners say. A faceman is required to scoop the entry ways after the continuous mining machine cuts the coal, rock dust the entry by hand, put up curtain for ventilation, hand shovel the ribs of all coal spillage, keep the roof bolter supplied with bolting supplies, move sump pumps to water holes, and carry out many other jobs to maintain the section.

In spite of the IAUWU “contract” language, many miners report they are not even being paid for the level of work they are performing, and it is almost unheard of to reach the maximum level of pay. One UMWA supporter who has worked in the mine for three years and is currently doing a faceman job said he is getting paid only \$6.50 an hour.

A mechanic in the surface shop, who is originally from Mexico, said he had been a mechanic for 19 years and has been talking to the bosses about a pay raise without getting anywhere.

The pro-UMWA miners at the IAUWU meeting said they used the gathering to expose the pro-company nature of this outfit. “Why do you have bosses as your officers?” one miner asked.

“Why are there so many members of the Kingston family now working at the mine?” another miner said.

The IAUWU representatives tried to deny that many members of the Kingston family—a wealthy clan with a business empire of \$150 million across six western states—work at the mine, workers said.

“What we were told by the ‘union’ officers was always—before the strike, and now—in defense of the company,” said Ricardo Chávez, a miner who attended the meeting. “Nevin Pratt would respond as if he were speaking directly for the company, responding to miners complaints by saying, ‘We’ll see what we can do.’”

At one point during the meeting, miners said, the Kingston representatives announced that workers would not be getting paid to attend the “union” gathering. At that point, the seven surface workers who had come to the meeting early became visibly upset, miners reported. It had been customary, they said, while the strike was going on, for Co-Op to give those who went to the company union meeting two extra hours’ pay.

“We were able to challenge these officials and stand up to them, showing to those miners who did not join the strike that this ‘union’ is the same as the company,” said Jesús Salazar. “That was worthwhile. You could see some of these workers nodding in agreement with us when we spoke during the meeting.”

Write-ups, warnings, harassment

Alyson Kennedy reported that her crew, which includes several members of the Kingston family, was called into the office on July 28 by Cyril Jackson, a maintenance foreman at the mine. She said Jackson instructed the miners that they were not allowed to say anything about a union, pro or con, on mine property. This is in direct violation of the NLRB agreement signed by the UMWA and C.W. Mining. The settlement clearly states the company cannot interfere with conversations workers are having about the union. As long as conversations by workers don’t disrupt production they can talk about whatever they want, according to this settlement. If workers can talk about baseball, then it is also within their rights to start a discussion with a co-worker about joining the union, miners said.

Kennedy also reported that she has faced stepped-up harassment by the bosses. Because the company does not provide a separate women’s bathhouse facility, Kennedy is forced to use the foremen’s bathhouse to change her clothes at the beginning and end of the workday. For 15 minutes before her shift and 30 minutes afterward the bosses’

Colorado protest against jailing of parolees



Amy Hatten/Craig Daily Press

Protesters picket August 4 at Moffat County Courthouse in Craig, Colorado, demanding release of Andy Seltzer. Parole officer Shane Fuchs put him behind bars for allegedly violating probation. Nathan Seltzer (above), 17, told the *Craig Daily Press* that his father had been granted permission to travel to Grand County to work and later was charged for going fishing there. More protests are planned in Grand Junction and at Seltzer’s August 24 parole hearing in Craig.

bathhouse is designated “Ladies Only” and Kennedy can use the facility. One day a boss deliberately used the bathroom just before the shift started, forcing Kennedy to wait and be late for her job. Kennedy’s boss then reprimanded her verbally for not being on time. Kennedy also said that her direct supervisor told her that bosses have filed two written complaints against her, based on the fact she was using the bathhouse five minutes before her designated time.

Kennedy said she challenged this discriminatory treatment and said she would not accept such reprimands. “I haven’t been given either of these bogus complaints yet,” she said.

Other miners also report that the bosses continue to selectively threaten and harass pro-UMWA workers at the mine as the company tries to ramp up production and undercut support for the union. All miners are working 12-and-a-half hour shifts, four days a week. The production crews regularly stay underground 13 hours, producing coal right up to the last minute.

Alejandro Ramírez, a union backer who was given two disciplinary points for missing work, was told that six points the company had slapped on him before the strike would be brought forward, giving him eight points. This is the level at which the company can fire a worker. Ramírez argued with the bosses, miners reported, refusing to accept the earlier six points, and so far the company has said it will take no action against him.

The miners who returned to work following the strike, and even those who crossed the picket line, regularly take on the bosses. “Workers just don’t take whatever the Kingstons are dishing out anymore,” said Bill Estrada, one of the leaders of the strike, who has been singled out for harassment a number of times since he returned to work July 12. “We stand up for ourselves and whenever possible we do it together.”

Recently a bearing in the tailpiece roller of the conveyor belt wore out, Estrada said. It had to be replaced, causing downtime in production. The bosses claimed Estrada was responsible, the miner reported, alleging he failed to do proper maintenance on the equipment. Cyril Jackson told Estrada he would have to sign a form accepting responsibility. Estrada said he told the boss he would not sign such a paper.

In the past, workers would routinely do what the bosses said, miners report, but management is seeing that things have not returned to business as usual at the mine.

Jackson has yet to give Estrada the “paper” he is supposed to sign.

‘Employee of the Month’ award

Trying to combine the carrot with the stick, the company is continuing to promote an “Employee of the Month” award, which it started during the strike. Of the eight awards given so far, five have been handed to foremen, all Kingston family members, miners reported. The extent of the “award”

is a plaque with a picture and description the company puts up in a glass display at the bathhouse.

UMWA backers said they were recently joking with the latest miner to receive this prize, one of the workers who did not support the strike. “What does this mean?” they asked him. “Are you getting a raise?”

This worker then turned to the boss who had presented the award and asked if that’s what the “prize” meant. The boss just started laughing.

Many miners report the bosses are floating rumors that there may be a pay hike coming, hoping to blunt support for the UMWA in the upcoming elections. But there has been no evidence so far that the Kingstons plan to make any concessions to the miners. Empty honors, poverty pleading, threats, and intimidation continue to be the weapons of choice of the Co-Op bosses in their war to prevent the workers from winning representation by the UMWA, the miners report.

According to a number of miners, Nevin Pratt told several workers after the company “union” meeting that not only was the company too poor to give the miners a raise, but that the UMWA was jeopardizing their jobs by insisting on back pay for the nearly 10 months the miners were illegally fired. In a thinly veiled threat, miners said, Pratt told a group of miners that since Mexican workers may not have all their documents in order they would not be eligible for back pay and could jeopardize themselves by insisting on back wages.

Stepping up labor solidarity

While continuing to fight for their rights on the job leading up to a union election, the Co-Op miners are also stepping up outreach to the labor movement and other supporters of their struggle to explain the issues in their fight and expand the solidarity that has been crucial so far in pushing back the bosses.

At a meeting of Co-Op miners on August 8, the workers decided to assign two of their members to travel to Seattle, Washington, on August 18 to speak before the King County Central Labor Council meeting. Longshoremen and other unionists in the Pacific Northwest region have been strong backers of the Co-Op fight. Through the labor council meeting, UMWA supporters are looking to expand solidarity.

The Co-Op miners said they are also planning for another barbecue/rally in Huntington over the August 21-22 weekend to bring together co-workers, family members, and supporters from throughout the state and elsewhere in the region. Such events update everyone on the latest developments in the struggle and help the miners talk out future plans.

Co-Op miners said they continue to urge supporters to send messages of solidarity with their ongoing struggle for union representation. These can be sent to the UMWA at 525 East 100 South, Price, Utah 84501. Tel: (435) 637-2037, Fax: 435-637-9456.

Support the Socialist Workers campaign in 2004!

Róger Calero for President

Arrin Hawkins for Vice President



Militant/John Brinks



Militant/Norton Sandler

Calero, second from left, on picket line with Maytag workers in Newton, Iowa, June 27.

Hawkins, right, talks with striking truck drivers at the Port of Miami July 2.

Róger Calero, 35, is the associate editor of the Spanish-language magazine *Perspectiva Mundial* and a staff writer for the *Militant*. He lives in Newark, New Jersey. Calero has lived in the United States since 1985, when his family moved from Nicaragua to Los Angeles. He joined the socialist movement there in 1993 and is a member of the Socialist Workers Party's National Committee, serving on the SWP's national trade union work leadership committee.

In Los Angeles Calero helped mobilize support in October 1994 against Proposition 187, a California ballot measure intended to deny undocumented workers and their children access to public education, health care, and other social services.

Working as a meat packer in the Midwest a few years later, Calero participated in a groundbreaking union-organizing drive at Dakota Premium Foods in South St. Paul, Minnesota. Immigrant and native-born workers came together to bring United Food and Commercial Workers Local 789 into that plant. More recently Calero has joined the efforts to expand labor solidarity with

the United Mine Workers of America strike by 75 coal miners fighting for union recognition and safe working conditions at the Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah.

In December 2002, immigration cops arrested Calero upon his return to the United States from reporting assignments at a conference held in Havana, Cuba, protesting the Free Trade Area of the Americas—a pact Washington is trying to impose on the region to extend its imperialist domination—and a congress in Guadalajara, Mexico, of the Continental Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Students.

Winning broad support from defenders of immigrant and workers rights and freedom of the press, and with the backing of the Socialist Workers Party, Calero waged a public campaign that prevented his deportation to Nicaragua and successfully defended his right to live and work in this country. The victorious struggle set an example of how to fight to win and inspired others in similar situations to resist and beat back government attempts to exclude them from the United States.

Arrin Hawkins, 29, is a garment worker in New York. She was the Socialist Workers Party candidate for lieutenant governor of New York in 2002.

Hawkins joined the Young Socialists in 2000 in the Twin Cities. She has also worked as an airline baggage handler and as a meat packer. In 2000 and 2001 she worked on the cut floor at the American Meat Packing Corporation plant in Chicago where she was involved in a union fight to win severance pay for hundreds of workers after the plant was shut down and the workers laid off without having received prior notice of the shutdown. The workers there mobilized to win broad labor and community support in their fight for back pay, health-care coverage, and severance pay.

Hawkins has been a part of international delegations to Cuba for the Cuba-U.S. Youth Exchange in 2001 and 2003. She participated in the conference of the Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Students held in Havana in 2000. She represented the Young Socialists at the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Algiers, Algeria, in 2001, and afterward visited the camps of the Polisario independence fighters in Tindouf, Algeria.

Hawkins helped build the April 25, 2004, March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., where hundreds of thousands marched in defense of a woman's right to choose abortion.

What the SWP stands and fights for

- **Support workers' right to organize unions and to defend themselves from the bosses' assaults. Defend the labor movement from the continuing offensive by the employers and their twin parties of capitalism—the Democrats and Republicans. For the formation of a labor party, based on the trade unions, that fights in the interests of working people.**

- **Support the efforts of the power-poor semicolonial countries to acquire and develop the energy sources necessary to expand electrification, a prerequisite for economic and social advances. Expose the drive by Washington and its allies to prevent the nations oppressed by imperialism from developing the sources of energy they need, including nuclear power, to bring much of humanity out of darkness.**

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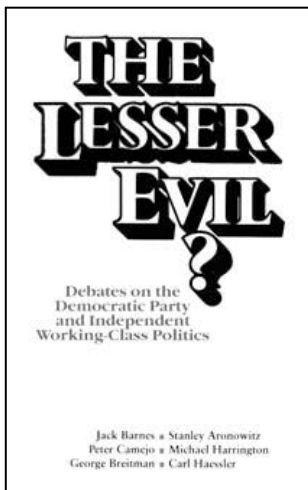
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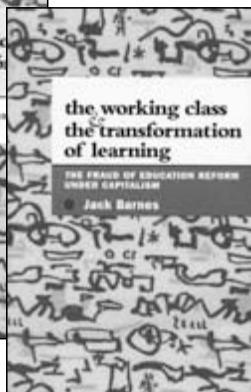
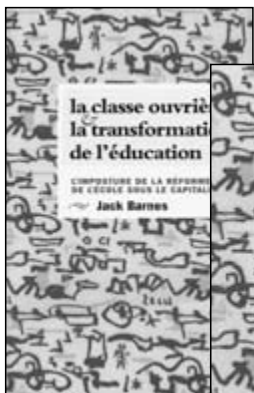
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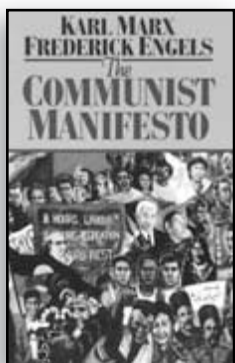
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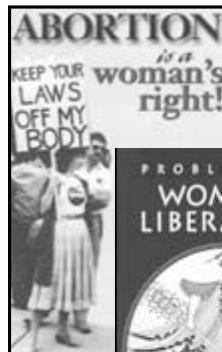
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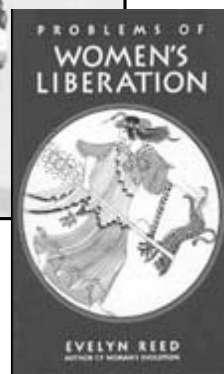


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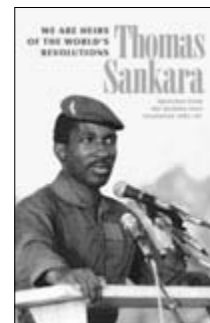
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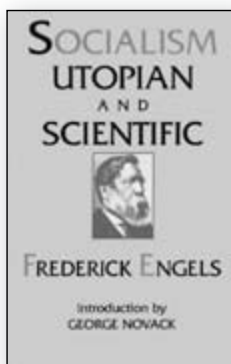


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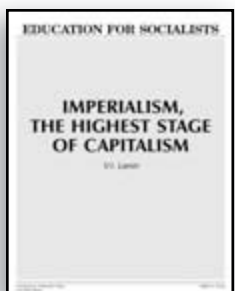
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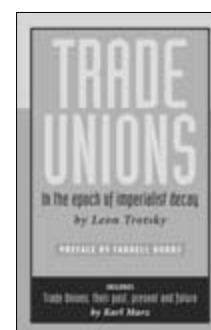


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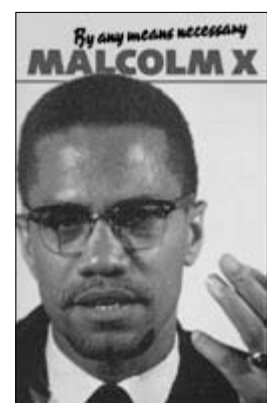
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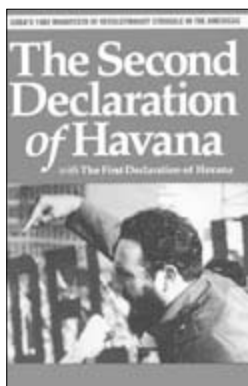


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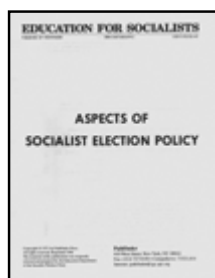
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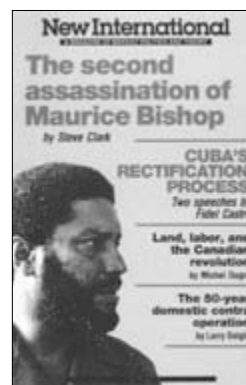
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New York homeless

Continued from Page 2

constantly getting sick. They don't get to sleep. And sickness spreads around."

"They say we're not eligible because we can go back to Puerto Rico and live with my grandmother," said Sharon Cepeda. "That would be 12 people in a house in San Juan."

"They call us 'clients,' but we feel like inmates," Woods said of the EAU.

Bloomberg plan

On June 23 the Bloomberg administration announced a plan whose stated aim is to cut the number of homeless people by two-thirds by the year 2009. This is not a bill before the city council but new guidelines the administration is already using.

One aspect of the plan announced by Bloomberg is to more aggressively enforce existing eligibility requirements. If a homeless person has relatives in the city, a caseworker may deem that they have "other housing options" and try to disqualify them from being sheltered, a method that is already commonly used. Those who are rejected may challenge the ruling and eventually gain shelter, but the effect of the policy is to discourage a larger number from doing so, said Nortz from the Coalition for the Homeless.

The June 27 issue of the New York *Daily News* reported on the case of Jackie Vanleu-

van, 21, and her eight-month-old daughter. The EAU rejected her, saying she had the "option" of living with her father—who had recently kicked her out of the house.

"Those who are ineligible for shelter cannot continuously clog the system and divert scarce resources that should go to those truly in need," said Bloomberg in announcing the new plan.

The rulers of New York applauded the mayor's proposal. A June 27 editorial in the *Daily News* declared that the problem is all the single mothers who "just decided to move out with the kids because they couldn't get along with grandma."

A second component of the Bloomberg plan is to finance 12,000 new units of "supportive housing" for the homeless. These are subsidized apartments combined with a building with social workers and a staff of psychiatrists and doctors.

The promise of new housing construction for the homeless may seem attractive and, if implemented, might even reduce the number of those in shelters or on the streets for a few years. Bloomberg's speech announcing the plan was "interrupted 10 times by applause from homeless advocates and business leaders," the *Daily News* reported.

But the mayor's plan does nothing to address the decline in real income and the general shortage of affordable housing, not



Militant/Paul Pederson

Families in need of shelter, like those above that the *Militant* interviewed August 3, go to notorious Emergency Assistance Unit in the Bronx, New York, to apply for housing.

to mention the housing budget cuts, which will only lead to more workers pushed out onto the street.

In addition, to stay in the "supportive housing," workers must submit to demeaning "mandatory monitoring" and a host of rules supervised by social workers.

Venezuela rally says no to recall of Chávez

Continued from Page 3

as "Into the heart of the neighborhood," is the name of a government-sponsored program that has brought Cuban doctors operating free, competent neighborhood clinics in working-class neighborhoods and rural areas across the country where workers and farmers have had little or no access to medical care.

Class confrontation

While the main figures in Coordinadora Democrática insist they have a good chance of winning the August 15 vote, frustration and even plans for resorting to violent means to try to topple the government are not uncommon among sections of the opposition.

A large quantity of C-4 explosives was recently stolen from a military base in Carabobo, said Freites and others. Miguel Salazar, a journalist in Valencia, has recently publicized claims by some unnamed admirals and other high military officers in that state who say they would stage a coup if the opposition is declared the loser on August 15. A large arms cache recently seized by the police in Brazil was likely destined for counter-revolutionary groups in Venezuela, said an August 7 article by the pro-government news web site *Venezuelanalysis.com*.

Carlos Andrés Pérez, a wealthy businessman who was previously the president of Venezuela and leader of Acción Democrática—now one of the two main opposition parties—recently stated from his luxurious quarters in south Florida, "Violence will allow us to remove him," referring to Chávez. "That's the only way we have." Pérez said Venezuela's president "must die like a dog, because he deserves it."

In response, the Venezuelan government has organized tighter security for polling stations, oil installations, and other production facilities around the referendum. On August 1, a court ordered the arrest of 59 former military officers on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the elected government and instigating insurrection. The officers had taken over a square in Caracas in October 2002 as a platform for resistance to government authority, and some had been involved in the failed military coup six months earlier.

In mid-May, the government arrested more than 100 Colombian rightist troops, disguises as "paramilitaries," and three Venezuelan military officers. They were all accused of a plot to bring down the Chávez administration organized by sections of the U.S.-backed opposition.

"There is no way the opposition could win the vote in the countryside," said Angel Sarmiento, a peasant in San Carlos, Cojedes state. He pointed to further advances by peasants in their struggles for land.

In the first half of this year, the number of peasant families that has received land titles, taking advantage of the 2001 agrarian reform law, has surpassed 115,000, he said—40,000 more than since the end of 2003. In the San Carlos area, Sarmiento said, nearly 2,000 peasants obtained new land titles and credits on 15,000 acres of land the last three months.

"I don't think they would win in Caracas either," he said. To succeed the opposition must receive a majority in the election, and garner more than the 3.76 million votes cast for Chávez in the last elections among the country's 14 million registered voters. "We all know that a victory for them at the ballot box or in any other way would be a return to the dark days, the days of unabashed murder of peasants, blatant exploitation, and loss of hope for the poor. We won't let

them turn back the clock of history."

Amagalys Heredia, another peasant who farms land as part of the Los Cañizos farm cooperative in the state of Yaracuy, agreed with Sarmiento's assessment, but pointed to the class contradictions that will remain intact even if the government wins the referendum. "We need to win the August 15 vote to gain more time for the real battle."

The biggest challenge workers and farmers face, she said, are the capitalists within the "pro-Chávez" camp. "Many of these businessmen speak pretty words, but they are doing everything to prevent us from implementing the agrarian reform law and are turning a blind eye when the private goons of big landlords murder militant peasants taking over land, like they did two weeks ago in the state of Zulia. We will deal with them."

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Why capitalism creates a housing crisis

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

NEW YORK—Working people living in the Phipps Plaza West apartment complex on Manhattan’s East Side are waging an uphill battle to prevent huge rent hikes or eviction. The landlord has pulled the 900-unit building out of a government housing program and raised previously controlled rents to “market rate.” Rent for a studio, for example, has jumped from about \$600 to \$1,700 a month.

The owners have taken the building out of the Mitchell-Lama program, a state plan instituted in the 1950s that gave landlords tax breaks and low-interest loans in exchange for constructing apartments that limited rent increases for at least 20 years. Having milked this state subsidy for 28 years, the landlord decided to “opt out” of the program in order to jack up rents, drive out the largely working-class and retired residents, and renovate the housing into luxury high-rises for well-paid professionals. The whole neighborhood is being transformed in a similar way.

This process, commonly known as “gentrification,” is one aspect of the sharp housing crisis that working people face in cities across the country. This squeeze is part of the mounting economic grind felt by workers and farmers today, from declining real wages to price increases for fuel and other necessities.

Two articles in the *Militant*, last week and on page 2 of this issue, have described the housing crisis in New York, which is similar to what working people face throughout the United States. This problem is not a new one. Tenements, slums, overcrowding, rent decontrol, and gentrification are terms describing aspects of the housing question that have marked the history of big cities like New York. The housing crisis is a permanent feature of capitalism, both in the United States and worldwide.

More than a century ago, Frederick Engels, who along with Karl Marx was one of the founders of the modern communist movement, addressed this question. He wrote a series of articles that appeared in the German socialist newspaper *Volksstaat* in 1872. They were reprinted in 1887 as a booklet titled *The Housing Question*. The pamphlet, which also appears in the second volume of the *Selected Works* of Marx and Engels (both by Progress Publishers), can be ordered from Pathfinder.

The basic explanation Engels gives about housing in capitalist society reads as if he had written it today.

Engels wrote his first articles in response to several pieces by Arthur Mülberger, a German follower of Pierre Joseph Proudhon, a French middle-class socialist reformer. He also polemicized against Emil Sax, a liberal bourgeois economist.

Engels explains that the housing shortage is rooted in the capitalist system, in the conflict between labor and capital.

Root of the problem: capitalism

“Whence the housing shortage then?” he asks. As a “necessary product of the bourgeois social order; that it cannot fail to be present in a society in which the great laboring masses are exclusively dependent upon wages, that is to say, upon the quantity of means of subsistence necessary for their existence and for the propagation of their kind; in which improvements of the machinery, etc., continually throw masses of workers out of employment; in which violent and regularly recurring industrial fluctuations determine on the one hand the existence of a large reserve army of unemployed workers, and on the other hand drive the mass of the workers from time to time on to the streets unemployed; in which the workers are crowded together in masses in the big towns, at a quicker rate than dwellings come into existence for them under the prevailing conditions.”

Given the overcrowding in the cities, Engels says, “there must always be tenants even for the most infamous pigsties.”

The landlord, faced with competition, is driven to “ruthlessly making as much out of his property in house rent as he possibly can. In such a society the housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and can be abolished...only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned.”

Rent is only part of the profits that capitalists extract from workers. “The pivot on which the exploitation of the worker turns

is the sale of his labor power to the capitalist and the use which the capitalist makes of this transaction,” Engels explains. Workers produce far more value for the bosses than they are paid in wages, which, on average, equal the cost of maintaining their ability to work and reproduce themselves, that is, of their labor power.

“It is this transaction between capitalist and worker which produces all the surplus value, afterwards divided in the form of ground rent, commercial profit, interest on capital, taxes, etc., among the diverse varieties of capitalists and their servitors,” Engels says.

In that sense, the housing shortage is not the main question working people confront, but one of the “secondary evils which result from the present-day capitalist mode of production,” he notes. The root of the problem, which needs to be attacked, is “the exploitation of the worker as a worker by the capitalists.”

What is rent?

Land rent arises from the private ownership of the land. It contains an element of monopoly price—many people want to live in cities but the amount of available land is limited. On the island of Manhattan, for example, the demand for a finite amount of land leads to very high rents.

The urban ground rent adds to the house rent, which derives from the fact that an apartment building or a house is a durable commodity built on a piece of land whose use can be sold a little bit at a time. The costs of repairs and utilities are added to the rent. The landlord also demands additional compensation for the fact that his capital is tied up in the building for an extended period.

“The expansion of the big modern cities gives the land in certain sections of them, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often enormously increasing value,” Engels explains. As the buildings deteriorate over time, they lower the value of the land, so “they are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with centrally located workers’ houses, whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected.”

The result, he writes, “is that the workers are forced out of the center of the towns towards the outskirts; that workers’ dwellings, and small dwellings in general, become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable, for under these circumstances the building industry, which is offered a much better field for speculation by more expensive dwelling houses, builds workers’ dwellings only by way of exception.”

This explanation by Engels gives a pretty accurate description of the long cycle in urban real estate values in New York and other big cities over decades.

Cycle of urban real estate values

The most exploited layers of the working class, who are the worst-paid and suffer the highest levels of unemployment, are forced to live in the most dilapidated neighborhoods. The ground rents and land values there are at their lowest. Eventually the capitalists tear down these buildings and often replace them with luxury apartments or commercial buildings. The land values soar and so do their profits.

Over time, the housing deteriorates and the land values drop. Lower-paid workers move in as better-off residents flee to other neighborhoods.

The capitalists often unload urban real estate when its value is at its peak, for example, in a neighborhood with well-built but somewhat aging apartment buildings. The real estate sharks then use their positions in the banking system to help drive land values sharply lower. In the 1970s numerous cases of redlining—where banks would not grant mortgages to renovate or build new apartments, especially in Black or Puerto Rican neighborhoods—were challenged and some lending terms were improved. While many of the most blatant practices were ended, banks and insurance companies continue to use discriminatory methods.

When the urban ground rents and land values reach their lowest point, the real estate interests can buy the land back at bargain rates. The housing is torn down or



Co-Op City, a cooperative housing complex in the Bronx, New York. Whether as tenants or homeowners, workers spend a substantial amount of their wages on housing, while conditions deteriorate. The housing squeeze is a permanent feature of capitalism.

remodeled and replaced with luxury apartments or commercial buildings.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was widespread abandonment in the poorest New York neighborhoods, including waves of arson in which landlords torched buildings to collect the insurance money. Rubble-strewn vacant lots dotted working-class areas like the South Bronx. The city government was forced to take over thousands of buildings and empty lots and to launch a substantial housing program, resulting in the improvement of many city-owned buildings. Over time, the city has sold off many of these properties to private developers.

Meanwhile, gentrification has continued, from Manhattan’s Lower East Side to Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Working people who can move are pushed to the northern part of Manhattan and to other boroughs in search of more affordable rents.

The vermin-infested housing and run-down neighborhoods simply reappear somewhere else. As Engels explained, “The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely *shifted elsewhere!* The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place produces them in the next place also.”

Instead of building decent housing for working people in the urban centers, the construction industry builds high-priced real estate.

Is worker ‘ownership’ the solution?

Engels argued against the “solutions” to the housing crisis offered by Mülberger and Sax. The two middle-class social reformers echoed the views of Proudhon, who advocated that workers be the owners of their own homes and set up co-operatives as a way to a secure future. Is that the answer?

Engels said no. First of all, under capitalism workers need maximum mobility to put themselves in the strongest position in relationship to the capitalists in the unending struggle for livable wages and job and living conditions. “It is precisely modern large-scale industry which has turned the worker, formerly chained to the land, into a completely propertyless proletarian, liberated from all traditional fetters, a *free outlaw*,” Engels said.

In fact, capitalist factory owners prefer that workers “own” their homes and small plots of land. They want working people tied down in a certain locality, forced to accept whatever conditions the bosses impose and unable to pick up and move elsewhere to find a better job.

“For our workers in the big cities,” Engels wrote, “freedom of movement is the prime condition of existence, and land ownership can only be a fetter to them. Give them their own homes, chain them once again to the soil and you break their power of resistance to the wage cutting of the factory owners. The individual worker might be able to sell his house on occasion, but during a big strike or a general industrial crisis all the houses belonging to the workers affected would have to be put up for sale and would therefore find no purchasers or be sold off far below their cost price.” That is why, Engels pointed out, some capitalists set up a company town and provide housing for workers—to make them more dependent.

Secondly, homeownership offers capitalists another way to exploit workers—through mortgage payments and property taxes that fall heaviest on working-class home owners. Instead of paying the landlord, workers pay the bank.

Thirdly, capitalists encourage homeownership to convince workers who “own” their homes that they are “property owners” sharing common interests with the capitalists against other sections of the working class, especially those who are unemployed.

Engels noted that housing cooperatives are simply a version of this trap for workers. Proudhon promoted the utopian and reactionary view that such cooperatives could serve as a refuge from the conditions of exploitation and uncertainty under capitalism.

There is no solution to the housing crisis under capitalism, Engels explained. As long as it exists, it will keep reproducing the social relations of class exploitation and all its related evils, from unemployment to economic depression, war, racist discrimination, and housing shortages. And the capitalist government, through its parties, will always defend the interests of the class of billionaire families who rule this country.

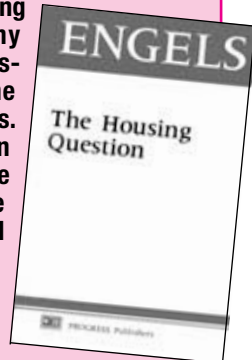
The only way to end these conditions is for workers, allied with small farmers—who are exploited by the capitalist system of rents and mortgages—to overturn the rule of the factory owners, bankers, and landlords, and to take political power into their own hands.

Engels suggested that as an immediate step, a government of working people could expropriate the surplus houses of the capitalists and make them available to the worst-off sections of the population.

A workers and farmers government would nationalize the land so that it is no longer a commodity, and instead its use could be guaranteed to working people without fear of eviction. This would be part of the solution that Engels explained was necessary: “The abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of subsistence and instruments of labor by the working class itself.”

The Housing Question by Frederick Engels

“As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist it is folly to hope for an isolated settlement of the housing question or any other social question affecting the lot of the workers. The solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of subsistence and instruments of labor by the working class itself.”
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Vote Socialist Workers 2004

Continued from front page
murderous policies of Tel Aviv against the Palestinian people? Why vote for Kerry, who supports Washington’s economic war on Cuba and calls for even more aggressive measures than the sitting president against Venezuela?

Why vote for Kerry, who is following the footsteps of his predecessor William “end welfare as we know it” Clinton and says abortion should be legal but rare? Abortion is a woman’s right to choose!

With either the Republicans or the Democrats working people go to the wall.

Instead, campaign for the socialist candidates. Something you can be *for*. That is what counts—not who you’re against, but what you’re for!

At the heart of the Socialist Workers campaign is support for workers’ right to organize unions and to defend ourselves against the bosses’ assaults on our jobs, wages, benefits, working conditions, and dignity.

Working people not only need to defend ourselves on the economic level—we need to organize independently of the employers in the political arena as well (see “What the SWP Stands and Fights For” on page 5). Socialists call for the launching of a labor party, based on the unions, to fight in the interests of workers and farmers.

Unable to inspire enthusiasm for their candidate, supporters of the Democrats sometimes argue we should vote for Kerry as a “lesser evil” to Bush and the Republicans. But this argument is false.

The cause of the worsening economic and social crisis—from exploitation by the bosses to wars of plunder abroad—is not an individual politician or a particular party holding office, but the capitalist system and the tiny handful of billionaire families that perpetuate their rule at the expense of the vast majority.

This capitalist class has two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Their two-party system is a trap designed to hoodwink working people into thinking that we have a choice—alternating between one gang of predators and another—and to keep us from attacking the real problem, capitalism.

Nor are the “independent” campaigns of Ralph Nader or the Green Party an alternative for working people. These are pro-capitalist third parties that are not independent from the ruling class. They serve as pressure groups on the Democrats, reinforcing the two-party con game.

The Socialist Workers Party is filing for ballot status in 14 states and the District of Columbia—from New York to Washington State and Florida. It is the only socialist campaign with ballot status on a national scale.

Some say the socialist campaign offers a perspective in the interests of working people—but it’s not realistic today. One frequent question is: Why campaign for candidates who cannot legally take office? To be president and vice president, the U.S. Constitution requires that you be U.S.-born and at least 35 years old. Róger Calero, a permanent U.S.

resident, was born in Nicaragua; Arrin Hawkins is 29 years old.

But Calero and Hawkins are far more representative of the majority of the U.S. population today than a couple of older millionaire hucksters. And with the rapidly growing numbers of residents who are foreign-born, there are more voices today calling for expanding the right to vote and hold office. This changing reality of U.S. politics is highlighted by the prominence of numerous foreign-born political figures today, such as the governor of California, Austrian-born Arnold Schwarzenegger, or former secretary of state Madeleine Albright. Just as the Constitution was amended under the Nixon administration to lower the voting age to 18, sooner or later some offices will be opened to those born abroad and the age limit for holding office will be lowered. The socialists support such changes because they serve the interests of the working class.

Another common question is: Well, I agree Kerry is a dismal option. But since only Democrats or Republicans will win the elections anyway, won’t voting for the socialists be a lost vote?

No, voting for a candidate you’re actually against—that’s truly a lost vote. Instead, vote for what you support: vote socialist!

We invite you to join with other socialist campaigners in distributing the campaign newspapers of Calero and Hawkins—the *Militant* and the Spanish-language socialist magazine *Perspectiva Mundial*—as widely as possible, together with books that give working-class explanations to the main problems facing humanity and point a way forward to resolve them in the interests of working people. As thousands of protesters fill the streets during the 12 days leading up to and during the Republican convention, Socialist Workers campaigners, from New York and around the country, will be joining the daily debates and discussions.

As part of this street campaigning, we are kicking off a 10-week drive—from August 28 through the weekend after the November 2 elections—to win 2,500 new subscribers to the *Militant* and 550 to *Perspectiva Mundial*. This is also a perfect time for those who have already subscribed to renew.

Socialists are also campaigning with a well-selected array of books and pamphlets that are featured in a four-page centerspread in this issue.

The questions posed in this year’s elections—“Is Kerry a ‘lesser evil’?” or “What’s the cause of the imperialist assault on Iraq?” among others—and the answers that communists and other currents in the workers movement give to them are not new. They have been tested in the class struggle over many decades. The socialist campaigners will be getting these books, pamphlets, and newspaper into the hands of as many people as possible to provide working-class answers to these questions.

Regardless of whether you vote in November, we urge you to join in campaigning for the working-class alternative—through November 2 and beyond.

As we go to press... Bankruptcy judge throws out UMWA contracts at Horizon mines

BY BRIAN TAYLOR

PITTSBURGH—Federal bankruptcy judge William Howard ruled August 9 that mine bosses at Horizon Natural Resources don’t have to honor contracts between the United Mine Workers of America and the company at six union mines in Illinois, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The union-busting decision eliminates medical coverage for 1,000 working miners and 2,300 retirees. Howard sided with the bosses, agreeing with their claim that contract obligations made their property unat-

tractive to prospective buyers.

“They go and hide under the shield of America’s bankruptcy laws and screw the workers,” said Phil Hepp, president of UMWA Local 9055 in Illinois. “Are we angry about that? Damn right we are. Most of us are in our late ’50s. Where are we going to turn for health care?”

“Workers at the Starfire mine,” Darrell Keyes, UMWA Local 5890 president in Kentucky, told the *Militant*, “can’t understand how one person can make a decision like this affecting so many peoples’ lives.”

Socialists campaign in Wisconsin

Continued from front page
line. “Unions are really important right now,” he said.

At the Third Ward Jazz Festival, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee student working at a food booth timed her lunch with the team’s break in order to discuss with them what it will take to unify working people in the fight against the employer class and its two parties. “I need to hear this,” she said. “My boss keeps trying to wear me down. I thought I was the only one who had these ideas.”

A young man of Vietnamese background translated socialist campaigner Bill Schmitt’s words into Vietnamese for his five friends. “You say your party is for the workers?” one of them asked, skeptical at first. When Schmitt said yes, they responded favorably to the Socialist Workers internationalist perspective to unite working people worldwide around our common interests.

Campaigning at a busy street corner in Milwaukee’s Black community, many signed the socialist ballot petition right away, reported Ernie Mailhot.

Others who were approached said, “This is not the time—this year the election is too important,” and declined to sign, Mailhot said. Some referred negatively to Ralph Nader supporters petitioning at the Summerfest and State Fairgrounds because they said Nader’s “independent” campaign might split the vote of those who would vote for Democratic candidate John Kerry to defeat George Bush.

To this, Hawkins explained at the rally, “Many say they respect what we say but that in November they don’t want to ‘waste’ their vote. We say: ‘Come November, don’t waste your vote on Kerry. Vote for what you want, what you need—vote Socialist Workers.’”

A woman at the rally who had just met the socialists said she liked the clarity of the slogan of the Socialist Workers campaign: “It’s not who you’re against, but what you’re for.”

“That really caught my eye from the first minute I saw it,” she said, adding that she intends to use that argument in the political discussions she has with friends and family.

‘Fahrenheit 9/11’: a pro-imperialist screed aimed at electing Kerry

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

Liberals and radicals have touted *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the latest film by Michael Moore, as an effective exposé of the “truth” about the Bush administration, from the outcome of the 2000 elections to its role in the U.S.-led war against Iraq. On his web site, *michaelmoore.com*, the filmmaker makes the modest claim that it is “perhaps the most thoroughly researched and vetted documentary of our time.”

Telling the truth, however, is not what guided Moore. The so-called documentary is simply a propaganda piece aimed at getting out the vote to “dump Bush” and to push the Democrats into the White House. It is not “antiwar” but a chauvinist, pro-American imperialist screed.

Moore has been fervently hustling votes for the Democrats in the 2004 race, and his film is part of that campaign. Asked by *USA Today* whether his anti-Bush movie is aimed at galvanizing the “choir” of faithful Democrats, Moore replied, “The choir needs a wake-up call. A large part of the choir isn’t energized by John Kerry and is not voting.”

On the opening night of the Democratic Party national convention, Moore spoke at a Boston forum with ex-presidential contender Howard

FILM REVIEW

Dean. Proclaiming himself a “patriot” and the Republicans as “hatriots,” he promised that “Kerry will not invade a country like George W. Bush did.” Why did the senator vote for the war on Iraq? “John Kerry did what 70-80 percent of our fellow Americans did. He believed” the White House’s arguments for going to war, but “now” he knows they were lies, Moore unabashedly asserted. Kerry just demolished this argument, saying he would have voted for the invasion anyway. The filmmaker also denounced Ralph Nader for running, saying that “the Republicans do love Ralph.”

The main argument in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is that the Bush White House has been incompetent in using the FBI and other cop agencies to “fight terrorism,” failing to prevent the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. It claims the administration diverted attention to a war against Iraq instead of going after the real danger to “America”: Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. This is also the main theme of the Kerry campaign.

The movie’s “documentation” relies heavily on statements made by former counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke, the architect of the Clinton administration’s 1998 bombing attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan.

In the film, narrator Moore complains that prior to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, “Bush cut antiterrorist funding for the FBI.” He interviews a state trooper in Oregon who says that, because of federal budget cuts, he is the only one protecting the coast of that state against any terrorist threat.

Moore reaches rock bottom in scenes on ‘Coalition of the Willing’

The film reaches rock bottom with its mocking portrayal of several nations whose governments were part of the “Coalition of the Willing” in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Apart from falsifying by omission—it leaves out three imperialist powers in the coalition: the British, Italian, and Australian governments—the film makes fun of Costa Rica and Palau (people in “quaint” costumes), Rumania (portrayed as Dracula), Iceland (depicted as Vikings) and the Netherlands (smokers in a hashish den). As Morocco is mentioned, the film flashes a shot of running monkeys, as the narrator says that the Moroccan government offered 2,000 monkeys for detonating land mines. The viewers are supposed to howl with laughter at this pro-American chauvinist “humor.” While some do, I noticed that not everyone in the theater I was in found it funny.

Equally grotesque is Moore’s anti-Saudi chauvinism. In arguing that Bush decided to invade Iraq to deflect attention from a “Saudi connection” in 9/11, he quotes “experts” alleging that wealthy Saudi businessmen “own 7 percent of America.” The film indignantly “reveals” that U.S. officials supposedly allowed 142 Saudi citizens to leave the United States after Sept. 11, 2001, while airports were shut down, and quotes a retired FBI agent insisting that the political police should have thoroughly interrogated Saudi immigrants. According to Moore, all members of the Bin Laden family should have been regarded as “terrorist suspects.” In fact, the film has not a word of criticism of the U.S. government’s post-9/11 dragnets against immigrants from the Middle East, South Asia, and elsewhere—only of the FBI spying on a middle-class pacifist group in California.

Fahrenheit 9/11 is a pro-war film. It approves of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and boosts the arguments of those calling for aggressive U.S. measures against Saudi Arabia. The last section focuses on the plight of U.S. soldiers sent to Iraq—but not to oppose sending U.S. troops into imperialist wars: just this one. Moore says, “Don’t send them into harm’s way unless it’s absolutely necessary”—the position of all Democratic and Republican politicians, whose disagreements are simply tactical ones about which wars are necessary and how they should be conducted to protect and advance the interests of U.S. imperialism.

To bolster the case for replacing Bush with a Democrat, Moore resorts to various conspiracy theories, that is, to the view that certain major events in U.S. politics were determined not by the normal functioning of bourgeois politics but by secret plots by a few individuals or groups. One is the fraudulent argument that Bush “stole” the elections. The film makes the absurd claim that decisive factors in the outcome were that 1) on election night, Bush’s cousin John Ellis was in charge of the decision desk at Fox News, the first network that called Florida for Bush, and 2) his brother Jeb Bush was the governor of Florida.

Fahrenheit 9/11 also peddles the crank view that U.S. imperialism’s foreign policy in the Middle East has been determined by a special business relationship between the Bush family and a “foreign power,” in this case the Saudi royal family. The film draws heavily on a book by Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship Between the World’s Two Most Powerful Dynasties*. The title of that book, like the movie, conveniently elevates the role of the wealthy Bush family above the other dynasties that make up the U.S. ruling class, such as the Rockefeller, Dupont, Forbes, and Heinz families.

Moore’s movie also relies on low-level personalized attacks on Bush, including the false assertion that Bush is “stupid.” His crude tone is of a piece with the coarsening discourse of bourgeois politics, which was seen most recently around the edges of the Democratic convention.

Event celebrates life of Almeda Kirsch

Socialist Workers Party cadre for 58 years

BY ILONA GERSH

CLEVELAND—A meeting was held here August 8 to celebrate the life of Almeda Kirsch and her contributions to building a proletarian party for nearly six decades. Kirsch, who died July 19 at the age of 83, was a member of the Cleveland branch of the Socialist Workers Party since she joined the SWP in 1946. The 50 participants came from Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, the Twin Cities, New York, and elsewhere. Twenty messages were received from individuals who had worked with Kirsch over the years.

Norton Sandler spoke on behalf of the party's National Committee and chaired the event. Kirsch, he explained, was born in the farming area of Ruggles Township in Central Ohio. She attended Ohio State University in Columbus for more than four years, studying music. Kirsch was a violinist and pianist. Herman Kirsch, also a music student at Ohio State, introduced her to socialist ideas. Herman had joined the SWP in 1939. The two were married in 1943. After living briefly in New York City, the couple returned to Ohio.

Almeda joined the SWP in the midst of the post-World War II strike wave that spread quickly across the country. She worked office jobs for the rest of her life. Herman was a member of the United Auto Workers at the Pesco division of Borg-Warner company for 30 years. The couple had three children.

Sandler noted that Almeda Kirsch lived through the anticommunist witch-hunt in the 1950s. The Cleveland branch of the SWP at the time threw itself into activity in defense of Black rights. In late 1955, the Black community in Montgomery, Alabama, organized a boycott of city buses after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the segregated Jim Crow bus system. Kirsch was assigned by the SWP to help raise funds to buy station wagons to be used during the Montgomery bus boycott.

The party campaigned in defense of the Cuban Revolution, which triumphed in 1959. Party branches were involved in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, which spread the facts about the revolution and opposed Washington's military moves against the revolutionary government in Havana.

"The party was deeply involved in the Black struggle of the 1960s," said Sandler. In Cleveland one of the main fights for Black rights centered on community control of the schools. Malcolm X spoke on a symposium at the Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland in April of 1964 on "The Negro Revolt—What Comes Next?" The speech is widely known as "The Ballot or the Bullet."

Dave Prince, now living in New York, explained how he was recruited to the YSA under the impact of the tumultuous events of the Black struggle, the Cuban Revolu-

tion, and the early stage of the Vietnam war. An art student at Oberlin College, he traveled to Cleveland frequently to attend political meetings and other events.

"This was important to my recruitment," said Prince. "I saw a well maintained hall, with books and the *Militant* newspaper, as part of a national organization. These things are only possible with disciplined activity and attention to organization and finances. Almeda helped set the tone that was necessary. When she took an assignment, you could count on it being carried out to the end and on time."

Debs Hall raid

Prince told the story of how a November 1965 benefit for the *Militant* attended by more than 75 people at Debs Hall, the SWP center, was raided by the liquor police and the Cleveland cops. "The hall that night was packed with Black community activists, workers, and youth who had worked together," he said. "Participants had been involved in a range of activities in defense of Black rights, including the just completed campaign by Carl Stokes, who ran as an independent Black candidate for Mayor. The attendance that night reflected how the party was right in the middle of things."

Plainclothes cops burst into the hall and pushed their way into the event. A cop fired shots into the ceiling and some participants were beaten. Thirty were thrown in jail and charged with "disorderly assembly," including Almeda. A broad defense campaign was waged and seven months later, in July 1966, the charges were dropped. Almeda and Herman were convicted of violating the state liquor laws, however, and had to pay a fine.

The next month, National Guard troops and cops went into the Black community of Cleveland to attack large-scale protests against a racist killing. Warrants were issued to re-arrest 29 of the defendants in the Debs Hall case, many of whom were activists in the Black community. A three-year fight led by the Committee to Aid the Debs Hall Defendants, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the NAACP, and the ACLU led to a court ruling which declared the disorderly assembly ordinance unconstitutional and reversed the convictions.

"One of my favorite haunts, as was the case for most of the Cleveland branch, was Almeda and Herman's home in Shaker Heights," Prince told the crowd. "Whether we showed up on short notice, or no notice, we were always welcome. I was an aspiring artist. I hoped to use art to change the world. I met several cultured workers and accomplished artists in the SWP" Prince referred to both Herman and Almeda, and also to Duncan Ferguson, a nationally known sculptor who was also a member of the branch at the time.



Militant/Osborne Hart

From left, Romina Green, Dave Prince, Ryan Scott, Helen Meyers, and Norton Sandler at August 8 meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, to celebrate the life of Almeda Kirsch.

James Harris, now a garment worker in Atlanta who was the SWP presidential candidate in 1996 and 2000, described what drew him to the party and Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) in 1968. "I was a student at Cleveland State University and president of the Black Student Union there," Harris said. "I became interested in the fight against the war in Vietnam and was attracted to the Cuban Revolution. This brought me around the SWP and YSA. There were many other groups at the time, all contesting for youth of our generation. I was attracted by the seriousness of the party Almeda committed her life to building."

Harris described how the 1965 campaign of Carl Stokes as an independent candidate for mayor of Cleveland grew out of the struggles of the Black community. When Stokes ran for reelection in 1969 as a Democratic Party candidate, the SWP ran Syd Stapleton for mayor. Harris ran for East Cleveland Board of Education. "Syd was 24 years old. I had been a YSA member for six months," Harris said. "The Communist Party criticized us for opposing Stokes. But we put forward a revolutionary perspective against that of the Democratic and Republican parties. We ran a bold campaign. Only the intertwining of generations made this possible."

In a message to the celebration Syd Stapleton wrote, "Almeda was always in the center of these events. She had a lot of responsibilities, between work and maintaining a household, and being a mother and an active member of the branch. But she was always ready to take an assignment, and never lost her cool. Almeda opened her home at the drop of a hat, never missed a branch meeting or executive committee meeting, and was always ready for a *Militant* sale or petition drive."

Movement against U.S. war on Vietnam

In the late 1960s and early '70s, Cleveland was a center of the movement against the war in Vietnam. Several conferences that drew thousands of youth and other activists were held here, where strategy and tactics for opposing the war were debated and an action course to oppose the imperialist war was charted.

Almeda's son, Fred Kirsch, who attended the meeting with his wife Sylvia and their two daughters, was among those shot at by Ohio National Guard troops when they opened fire on a student demonstration at Kent State and killed four students on May 4, 1970. The *Militant* ran a front-page article authored by Fred, who then went on a speaking tour to explain the truth about what became known as the "Kent State massacre."

"In 1977-78 the party decided to organize its members to work in basic industry and carry out political work in the trade unions," said Sandler. "We made this decision following the defeat of the U.S. government in Vietnam, and the 1974-75 worldwide recession that intensified international capitalist competition and drove the employers to make fresh assaults on the trade unions."

"Some members split from the SWP over this perspective," the SWP leader said. The course the party charted at this time is detailed in the book *The Changing Face of U.S. Politics*, by SWP national secretary Jack Barnes (see centerspread ad). Among those who left, Sandler said, were some party members of Almeda's generation with whom she had collaborated for decades.

"Her grounding in revolutionary theory, internalized for decades, and her practical

experience in building the party convinced her that the party was right," Sandler noted. "She knew in her bones that this was the correct course, and never looked back. It's easy to underestimate a person like Almeda because she didn't speak often. But she would speak up when something didn't seem right or needed clarification."

Defense of abortion clinics, avid reader

Sandler described how Kirsch, already well into her 70s, was part of the daily mobilizations that chased the right-wing anti-abortion group Operation Rescue out of Cleveland after their failed campaign in July 1993 to shut down abortion clinics in the Cleveland area.

"From 1993 until she moved to Judson Manor Home she came to most of our monthly counter-protest gatherings on Shaker Boulevard," wrote Marilyn and Mike LaQuatra of the Cleveland Pro-Choice Action League (CPAL), in another message. "We all knew she had attended more protests than any of us would ever achieve so we listened to her opinions and experiences."

Helen Meyers, chairperson of the Cleveland SWP, spoke about the last two years of Almeda's life. "She always took her membership in the SWP very seriously," said Meyers. "After she had a stroke in 2003 that left her blind in one eye and caused other health problems, she decided to retire from weekly activity in the party. This was a difficult decision for Almeda because she took her vote in weekly branch meetings seriously. She didn't want to raise her hand in favor of a decision that she was not in a position to carry out. But she never changed her political conviction of the need for socialism and for a revolutionary party."

"Almeda loved to read," Meyers continued. "While in college she got tuberculosis and spent 9 months in a sanitarium. She read the whole time there. Rules forbid patients from reading after dark, but Almeda used her heat lamp under the blanket to read the *Militant*. She followed the trial of 18 SWP leaders and trade unionists in Minneapolis who were convicted for conspiracy against the government for opposing World War II." She read until the end of her life, including Pathfinder's recent book *Aldabonazo, Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground, 1952-58*, which she took time to discuss with Meyers.

Schooled in classical music, "Almeda also loved reggae and jazz," wrote Omari Musa, now in Miami, who worked with her in the early 1980s. "We saw Miles Davis, Peter Tosh, Yellow Man, Grover Washington, and several others at concerts."

"I didn't know Almeda Kirsch," said Ryan Scott of the Young Socialists, who was the final speaker. "But from what I've heard about her today, she led the kind of life I'd like to emulate."

Scott has been part of the national effort to win ballot status for the SWP candidates in recent weeks (see front-page coverage). The meeting was the grand finale for eight other young socialists from around the country who have been on the national campaign team. Scott ended by inviting all young socialists and other campaign supporters to go to New York City to campaign for socialism at the protests leading up to and during the Republican national convention, beginning August 20.

Participants contributed \$1,000 to an Almeda Kirsch Pathfinder fund announced at the meeting. Anyone wishing to contribute to this effort can send a check to Pathfinder at 306 W. 37th St., 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

ALABAMA

Birmingham

2 Billion People in the World Have No Electricity: The Stakes for Building a Fighting Alliance of Workers and Farmers Speaker: Clay Dennison, Socialist Workers candidate for Congress, 7th C.D. Fri., Aug. 27, 7:30 p.m. 30294 Bessemer Rd. Tel: (205) 780-0021.

CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Why Working People Should Oppose Intervention in Africa. What's Behind the Conflict in Sudan? Speaker: Don Hammond, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Aug. 20. Dinner at 6 p.m.; program at 7 p.m.

The Economic Grind: Housing, Health Care and Unemployment. Fri., Aug. 27. Dinner at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. Both events at 4229 S Central Ave. Tel: (323) 233-9372.

NEW YORK

Manhattan

Venezuela: Majority Says 'No' to Pro-imperialist Recall. Fri. Aug. 20. Dinner at 7 p.m., program at 8 p.m.
It's Not Who You're Against, It's What You're For. Meet the Socialist Candidates. Róger Calero for president, Arrin Hawkins for vice president. Friday Aug. 27. Dinner at 7 p.m., program at 8 p.m. Both events at 307 W. 36th St. 10th Floor. Tel: 212-629-6649.

CANADA

Toronto

Celebrate the Opening of the New Pathfinder Books and Militant Labor Forum Hall Sat., Sept. 4 (time to be announced). Program will be accompanied by a dinner to raise funds for the Can\$1,800 campaign to pay for the costs of the move. 2238 Dundas Street West, Suite 201 (five minutes walk south of Dundas West subway station). Suggested donation: \$10. (416) 535-9140.

Over 460 die in Paraguay store fire

Workers outraged at owners who ordered doors locked to ‘prevent theft’

BY MILLIE SÁNCHEZ

At about 11:00 a.m. on August 1, a fire broke out in a branch of the Ycuá Bolaños supermarket chain located in Trinidad, a suburb of Asunción, Paraguay’s capital. The death toll from the blaze that engulfed the three-story shopping center had risen to 464 as of August 3, with another 409 people still hospitalized with serious injuries. Many succumbed after inhaling carbon monoxide.

When the initial explosion that sparked the inferno took place, it is estimated that 1,000 people were inside the supermarket.

The store is owned by Juan Pío Paiva. His son, Víctor Daniel Paiva, and Humberto Fernando Casaccia, are co-owners.

Ismael Sánchez, a security guard at the store, said that as soon as the owners got wind that something had gone awry they ordered the cashiers to stay put and the security guards to lock all doors and shut down other possible exits to prevent theft.

Such testimony, and the public anger it unleashed among working people, led government prosecutors to file charges of involuntary manslaughter against Pío Paiva and five others, including some security guards. Paraguay’s TV Channel 13 reported that a judge has ordered the storeowner imprisoned while the investigation is taking place.

Angry survivors have already described to government prosecutors what transpired as a result of the criminal action by the bosses. Julio Daniel Silvulierro, for example, is a packer at the supermarket who said he happened to be next to cash register no. 5 when he heard an explosion coming from the store’s food court. Immediately, customers started running toward the doors, he said, only to find they were trapped inside because the exits had been shut.

Néstor González, who was in line to pay



Reuters

Smoke rises from Ycuá Bolaños supermarket on outskirts of Paraguay’s capital, Asunción, where 464 people died August 1 as owner locked doors after fire broke out.

for his groceries, said he saw smoke coming out of the ceiling in the northern and southern sections of the store. He said he ran to the door and confronted security guards who were preventing people from exiting.

The bosses had given such strict orders to the guards to keep the doors locked that when Juan Carlos Valiente, a volunteer firefighter who was among the first to arrive on the scene, tried to break down one of the entrances, a security guard attacked him to the point of firing his pistol twice into the air as a warning, the Paraguayan daily *ABC Color* reported.

The same newspaper reported that the material below the roof of the store was

highly flammable, causing the fire to spread rapidly. As this issue goes to press, authorities have not provided an official explanation of the cause of the disaster.

The first reports in the media had floated the unsubstantiated story that a car bomb caused the explosion. The apparent intent was to minimize the culpability of the supermarket owners for the catastrophe. Soon afterwards, however, technicians looking for evidence on the scene dismissed this “theory.” Investigators said that a spark coming into contact with highly flammable material inside the store caused the explosion that started the blaze. Inquiries continue to this day.

According to the Bloomberg News service, Manuel Sarquis, director of the government’s national emergency committee in Asunción, said August 3 that a gas leak in the food court is the most probable cause of the fire.

Most editorials in Paraguay’s press describe this as an “accident” and “the worst disaster in the country’s history.” But all the evidence so far points to criminal negligence, deliberate actions, and contempt for working people whom the owners saw as potential robbers at a time of danger—not human beings whose lives needed to be saved—as many survivors pointed to in their stories. All this to safeguard the profits of the bosses, which seems to be the reason for the extent of the catastrophe.

The shopping center was frequented not only by residents of Trinidad but thousands of working people and others in a number of the neighborhoods of Asunción and its suburbs. As a result, hundreds of families in many areas of the capital are now mourning more than one relative who died in the blaze. I watched testimony on TV by one worker, for example, who lost three sons and a nephew in the disaster.

Wave of public fury

The catastrophe unleashed a wave of public fury, which is what forced the authorities to take action. Prosecutors are now reportedly demanding 25-year-prison sentences if the owners are found guilty, along with freezing all their assets, and have also filed charges against some of the security guards.

The bosses, of course, are denying any responsibility. Javier González, attorney for Ycuá Bolaños president Juan Pío Paiva, said the owner “wasn’t present when the fire started and at no time ordered the doors locked,” according to Bloomberg News.

The owners are also trying to shift blame for orders to guards to lock the exits onto the store’s manager, Víctor Ruíz, who perished in the blaze.

Volunteer rescue workers who rushed to the scene told the press that a great number of the victims were found dead pressed against the store’s exits, which reinforces the explanation now accepted by most people that the doors had been locked. Horrific scenes were televised later, including ones showing entire families found holding loved ones in each other’s arms, but completely incinerated.

Of the 464 dead, reportedly only 325 have been identified. The other 139 deceased are impossible to recognize because of the extent of the burns and decomposition of the bodies. A more lengthy process based on examination of DNA and dental records is now under way to determine the identities of these victims.

Public hospitals, which often lack basic supplies, have been overwhelmed by the disaster and have not been able to offer adequate care to those in need.

The Cuban government was among the first in the world to provide assistance. Fifteen Cuban doctors arrived in Asunción August 5 to help treat the injured, and said they would stay in Paraguay as long as they were needed.

“We have to act with caution to avoid problems in the future,” said Miguel Carrizosa, the president of Paraguay’s Congress, referring to the slowness in the identification process. Carrizosa made no mention of the criminal acts by the owners of the shopping center that caused the disaster in the first place, or the need for the government to act swiftly to ease the pain of hundreds of people still searching for their loved ones among the rubble, and to ensure the best possible care for the injured.

The capitalist politicians of Paraguay always act with “caution” before taking any measure that may even slightly benefit working people. This is another example that makes it clear that the ruling class acts only to defend its property interests.

Australia printers strike, resist permanent-seasonal tier

BY ALASDAIR MACDONALD

SYDNEY, Australia—About 110 workers have been on strike here against McPhersons Printing since July 3 to defend their contract and fight company attacks on their jobs and conditions. The company is attempting to win concessions from members of the printing division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) by pitting permanent workers against those who are seasonally employed. Seasonal workers make up half the workforce.

Pickets said they decided to strike when the company sought to scrap the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA), or contract, putting in jeopardy the gains the union had won over the past 10 years. Since the walk-out began, the unionists have stopped all production, they said.

Workers at the picket line said that they operate three giant printing presses and the binding equipment used to produce the telephone directories for half of Australia.

The walkout began over company demands to cut the pay of seasonal workers by as much as 20 percent, terminate 30 out of the current 50 seasonal workers, and reduce the workforce all around by initiating a plant-wide speed-up of production.

In an interview with *Militant* reporters, chief site union delegate Mark Aubry said that the company moves represented a “divide and conquer strategy.” He noted that most of the permanent workers are Australian-born, while the majority of the seasonal workers are immigrants from Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries.

The universal support for the walkout and the composition of those walking the picket lines, however, show the solidarity between the permanent and seasonal workers who are taking action to overcome these divisions in struggle. Many of the seasonal

employees have been rehired several times and have more than 10 years in the plant. “We’re out here to protect what they have,” Aubry said, referring to the gains in wages and conditions of the seasonal workers. “We’re all union members,” he added.

Militant reporters were also told that the company had offered every worker who agreed to the new EBA a one-time

AS\$4,000 payment (A\$1 = US\$0.71). The unionists said they rejected this proposal unanimously. “The company has been preparing this for two years,” Aubry said. He noted that the bosses had brought in a team of lawyers hoping to use them to deal blows to the union through the courts.

So far, the company has not attempted to bring in scabs, workers said.

Swedish rulers try to paint as ‘terrorist’ man released from Guantánamo prison

BY BJÖRN TIRSÉN

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—Mehdi-Muhammed Ghezali, 25, was released to his home country, Sweden, July 8 from the U.S. prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He had been one of the nearly 600 prisoners Washington is holding there indefinitely and without charges since its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Ghezali had been imprisoned since January 2002.

In an interview with the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter*, Ghezali described his time in “Camp X-ray.” The interrogations began immediately after his arrival there, Ghezali said. He was pressured to repeat his life story over and over again.

After six months of harassment—including interrogations observed by a Swedish police officer who acted as part of a Swedish government delegation—Ghezali decided to remain silent, he said. The U.S. military police responded by refusing to turn over to him any letters from his family.

The Swedish government sent envoys to help the U.S. guards to force him to talk. As a condition for his release, he said, he had to sign a statement crafted by Swedish and U.S. officials pledging that he would neither threaten Washington nor associate

with any group related to the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan or al-Qaeda.

Ghezali also described some of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his captors. This included turning off the heat in his cell for hours at a time, turning on loud music or noise in his cell for long periods, and putting him in chains that cut into his wrists.

The big-business press in Sweden has attempted to discredit Ghezali. An article appeared July 17 in both major dailies here—*Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*—titled “Gaps in Ghezali’s story,” which tried to paint him as a “suspected terrorist.”

“There are question marks regarding his possible connection to terrorism,” the article said. “Starting with Ghezali’s own account, you cannot tell what he was doing in Afghanistan during this dramatic time. The incidents Ghezali describes hint that he could have had connections with al-Qaeda.” The article promoted the idea that Washington had been justified in jailing him.

The Guantánamo Group, an association formed to win Ghezali’s release, is currently organizing his housing and his defense against possible victimization by Swedish authorities.